582 was made on page 83, where it was said that a woman
564 of any clan of North Malabar may not consort with a
184 man of the same clan name belonging to South Malabar. Following this principle, the man may do so. A woman of South Malabar (inferior), mating with a man of her own clan name of North Malabar (superior), would be following anulômam; but a woman of North Malabar cannot, under pain of being guilty of pratilômam, mate with a man of her own clan name of South Malabar.
564 Alliances between the people of North Malabar and
484 South Malabar seem to be extremely rare; partly, per-
784 haps, because of this custom which is all compulsive, partly because the Nâyar women of North Malabar
[628] cannot cross the river which marks the boundary between the two. Nor, as said before, can the Nâyar women of Chirakkal, the northern-most portion of Malabar, cross the river which lies between it and South Canara to the northward. Thus, they cannot go beyond their northern or southern boundaries. The origin of this interdiction to cross the river southwards has been explained to me as emanating from a command of the Kólattiri Rajah in days gone by, when, the Arabs having come to the country about Calicut (South Malabar), there was a chance of the women being seized and taken as wives. An explanation which is somewhat fanciful. The prohibition to cross the river to the northwards is supposed to have originated in much the same way, but I have not
564 noted precisely what it is. Again, men of the Kurup
582 clan of Katattanâd may mate with women of the Nambiyâr clan who live in Kôttayam, but they may not mate with women of the Nambiyâr clan living in Chirakkal. The custom imputing superiority or inferiority to those of a clan inhabiting a certain locality is obscure; it has its counterpart elsewhere in Malabar.

793 "Except the Nambûtiri, the Nâyar has no other
564 priestly, spiritual or religious instructor; and it is for the gratification of this Bhú-dévan (earth god) that the Sûdra woman, if she has any religious instruction at all, is taught that she was created." We have heard what Hamilton has said about this (see Bulletin, Vol. III, No. I). Though the first portion of this statement is not quite accurate, for we have seen that the priests and religious instructors of the Nâyars are not admitted to be, strictly speaking, Nambûtiris, yet on the whole it is not far wrong, as the Nambûtiri is esteemed as a very exalted person, and he may ply his music among the Nâyar ladies without very much restriction. As remarked before, the

8:Panikkar I-4, 5 (no date) 1918 AWll Kerala AWll Nayar

rhyme, and I must say that I never knew anyone who took an oil bath on a Thursday, except people who take it every day.

The tabus extend to the way in which you sleep. You are not supposed to sleep with your body north to south or west to east. The reason, I believe, is that the spirits of the dead are supposed to live in the south and in the east, and if you lie with your head facing them you might become possessed of them.

There are certain days of the lunar month on which no one may start on a journey :

Yama Rudrāki Muppēram
Trkelta iva ēzhu Naal
Vilakkil vilīyā Bhāmi
Pōkunnakil aran varō.

On the seven days presided over by the seven stars thus enumerated, if a land is sowed no seed will sprout, if anyone starts on a journey he will not return.

I remember a curious story connected with this. Some four months before leaving for England I had to see the Inspector of Schools in Travancore to get my Leaving Certificate. The only day available for me was one of these tabu days, and in spite of the protests of everybody else in the house, I set out on my business. When I reached the capital of the state the Inspector of Schools had left on circuit an hour before to the place where I started from. I followed him there, but when I arrived he had left the place, and, as a result of continuous journeying and bad food, I was laid up in bed through a physical breakdown. It was true that if I had not started on that tabu day, but had had the patience to wait for another twenty-four hours the Inspector of Schools would have come to the town where I was living ; it was also true that I came back very ill. Everyone, therefore, took it for granted that all this ill-luck was due to my starting on a bad day. Many are the stories that are told of people suffering great misfortunes due to starting on these bad days, and there is, as M. Reinach would say, " a vast oral tradition of leading cases " connected with it. I daresay my case will go down as a most authentic one, as the facts are undoubtedly true ; only the explanation is doubtful.

Tabus like this can be mentioned without end ; but it is useless to do so, as they all seem to have the same " rationale " : that is, you will break your peace with the world of demons and ghosts that surround you and bring down upon yourself their wrath if you break any one of these rules. Tabu among the Nāyars is essentially an arrangement to keep the ghosts and spirits pacified : for it is clear to them from the tested experience of past ages that to break any of these rules is to challenge those who have power to do them great harm

In whatever is said here, it should be understood that I have tried to eliminate from the Nāyar beliefs those elements which are indubitably Hindu. As I have pointed out at the start, there are a good many devout Hindus among the Nāyars, but it is an interesting fact that the practices and beliefs above described are pre-

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906)1912
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553
554 Malabar, where it is a creation of the Zamorin.

7. *Asán.*—The word means a teacher. He is also a head-man (*Karayinmél Asán*), who has certain social functions in connection with the marriage and other ceremonies.

8. *Achan.*—The word means father. It is the title of the Palghat Rajas, the ministers of the Calicut and Cochin Rajas (Mángát Achan and Páliyat Achan), and also of several other old Nayar chiefs.

9. *Manndtiyar.*—This is the title of certain aristocratic families in the Chittur Taluk near Palghat. The word is derived from *man*, earth, and *néttiyavar*, earners.

564 582 833 783 Marriage prohibitions. Among the high caste Sudras marriage is hypergamous, while the low caste Sudras are endogamous. This is the general rule, though exceptions may sometimes be found. A Nayar is allowed to cohabit with a woman lower in the social scale than himself, but his womenkind are prohibited from exercising the same liberty. This is called the *Anulómam* and *Prathilómam*. Dr. Gundert derives *Anulomam*[1] from *Anu* with *lómam rómam* the hair, going with the hair or grain. So *Prathilómam* means going against the hair or grain. According to this usage, a Nayar woman, consorting with a man of the higher caste, follows the hair, purifies the blood, raises the progeny in social estimation. By cohabitation with a man of lower subdivision, clan or caste, she is guilty of *Prathilómam*; and if the difference of caste were admittedly great, she would be turned out of her family to prevent the whole family being boycotted.[1]

564 582 783 The rule of *Anulómam* and *Prathilómam* is everywhere observed with great strictness. In many cases, Nambuthiris, Embrans, Póttis and Tamil Brahmans, Kshatriyas and

1. Alliances between the people of North Malabar and South Malabar seem to be extremely rare. It is partly because of the principle of Prathilomam and perhaps partly that the Nayar women cannot cross the Korapuzha which marks the boundary between the two. Nor can the women of the extreme south of South Malabar cross the river to travel it and South Canara. The reason in said to be that the Kolathiri Raja so commanded owing to the fear that were entertained about their being captured and taken as wives by the Arabs. Similarly, till about fifty years ago the Nayar women from North Travancore and Cochin were prohibited from going beyond Quilon southward. These customs are being overruled by the educated members of the community and it may almost be said that the custom has begun to die out.

[784] [562] [484] Further, in the extreme south of South Malabar a high caste bride mates with a low caste bridegroom as the Prathilomam already explained. The husband cannot touch her without pollution, when she is engaged in taking meals. In the case of Nambuthiris, the same customs in in force and they cannot be seen, while engaged in religious ceremonies or taking meals. With the spread of education, official status, wealth, power, and influence, many of these time-honoured customs are fast disappearing.

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949)1963 AWII Kerala AWII

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CHAPTER 2

THE POLYANDRY OF THE THANDANS (TIYAS), KAMMALANS, AND OTHER ARTISAN CASTES OF KERALA

Anthropological research in Kerala is not, and never has been, easy. Human society there, as we shall see from what follows, is extremely complex, being made up of innumerable Hindu castes, sub-castes and outcastes, to which must be added other non-Hindu communities, such as the Moslems, Christians, and Jews. To gain an insight into these, or even, as in our case, into only a section of them – namely those practising polyandry – is a painstaking affair, especially when one realizes, as one very soon does, that the customs of a single ethnic group are by no means uniform in the whole state and often vary radically from north to south.

The climate, too, is a problem. Most of Kerala is damp and tropical all the year round, with a very wet period during the summer monsoon from June to October. The record density of the population makes for poor and inadequate quarters in which to live. Communications are bad, the rainy season disrupting traffic quite seriously with floods and high winds because of the physical nature of the land, which can be described as follows.

A. KERALA, A DESCRIPTION

1. ENVIRONMENT

The State of Kerala stretches, today, from the boundary of South Canara in Mysore State in the north, to Cape Comorin in the south, the latter being the most southerly point of the Indian continent. It is an extremely narrow belt of coastland, only five miles wide at some points and never exceeding seventy at its widest, which is at the Palghat gap. It is bordered on the west by the Arabian Sea of the Indian Ocean, in which are to be found the Laccadive islands, administratively part of the State, and on the east, by the imposing range of mountains called the Western

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949)1963 AWll Kerala AWll

thorns and planted with big-leaved plantains, flowering bushes such as the hibiscus, and tall, slender arecanut palms, their graceful, shining trunks entwined with betel and pepper creepers. Here and there, a red tiled roof denotes the dwelling of some high-caste person, while elsewhere, the thatched roofs of the ordinary houses reveal the low social status of the majority.

Red laterite dust roads criss-cross this green scenery, highways and lesser paths upon which a continual stream of men and women, scantily clad in white, are forever on the move. Dry river beds in the spring and swollen, muddy torrents in the monsoon season, are crossed together with the broad expanse of calm, smooth backwaters on the way east to the inland red laterite hills. It is here that the majority of the terraced paddy fields are met with, green and flooded in the summer and dried up, with tufts of yellow straw stalks the rest of the year, their fringes strewn with rustling, restless coconut trees.

2. MYTHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Hindu Brahmin tradition has it, so I heard from my informants in this region, that Kerala (*Malayalam* or *Keralabhumi* as it is called in the *Keralolpatti* and *Kerala Mahatmyam* chronicles) was created from the sea by Parasu Raman, the axe-wielding avatar of the god Vishnu, and given to those Brahmins called Nambudri for their perpetual possession and enjoyment. The myth, to which even the modern Hindu inhabitants of Kerala subscribe, is no doubt symbolic of two things: the geological origin of the land at the foot of the Ghats, which appears really to have been uncovered from the sea in some ancient natural upheaval, and the colonization of Kerala by Aryan invaders from the north in a remote and ill-defined past.

The mythological tale, in detail, is that Parasu Raman was once ordered by his father to kill his mother, because the latter had been seen by her husband smiling at a youth when she was fetching water at the well. The son, in filial obedience to his father, carried out the order, but having done so, attempted in every possible way to atone for the abominable crime of matricide. He consulted Brahmins who requested of him that he exterminate twenty two generations of the rival warrior caste of Kshattryas. This he did, but the Brahmins were not satisfied. Parasu Raman then climbed the Western Ghats and, from the highest point, cast his axe into the sea calling upon it to withdraw, which it did. The land of Kerala thus came into existence and Vishnu's avatar, the

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949) 1963 AWll Kerala AWll

105 563 795 There is a small community of Jews in Cochin, divided into White, Brown, and Black, the last named being the most numerous. Other Kerala residents are foreigners such as Canarese, Tamils, Arabs, and Europeans.

105 564 783 Untouchability has been made a penal offence by the present Indian Constitution and there is undoubtedly a tendency among the more enlightened in the country to combat its evils and attempt to eradicate it from modern Hindu society. On the other hand, the religious minded (and there are many) maintain that since the Constitution is a secular one and allows full freedom of religious belief and practice, the legislator cannot interfere in questions of caste and untouchability, as these have to do with the religious law and structure of India. The fact is that, today, untouchability is not what it was, but it cannot be said either that it has been done away with altogether. A visitor to Kerala is certainly immediately made aware of this, as many traditional views on what constitutes intercaste pollution and what does not are still very much in evidence. Thus, although a member of the artisan caste, a [784] Kammalan, perhaps no longer pollutes those above him in the hierarchy, [264] atmospherically, at twenty four feet as he used to do, it is nevertheless unthinkable that he should sit down to a meal of cooked rice with a [463] Nambudri, or even for that matter with a Nayar. The aboriginal Nay- [484] adis who still live off begging and hunting may possibly "come into [784] town" now and not have to keep off the roads for fear of polluting other castes merely by being seen within a distance of seventy four feet, but they are not for that admitted to a would-be reformed Indian community in which no distinctions of caste, creed and colour are made any longer; in fact, they themselves, probably out of some sort of perverse attachment to their powers of polluting, refuse to be rehabilitated – as has been attempted by the former government of Travancore – and prefer to carry on with their traditional way of life.

It can thus be safely said that pollution of the higher castes by the lower is very much believed in and guarded against, even in Kerala [841] today. Menstruating women, and also those who have given birth, are [846] still considered to be unclean for a period, varying with the people to whom they belong. And the various kin groups, of which every indiv- [614] idual is a member among the Hindus of Kerala, will equally be con- [846] sidered unclean and polluting for a certain amount of days – diminishing [765] in number in inverse proportion to the height of the caste – after a birth or a death has taken place.

Respect towards a superior, towards a god, towards a respected par-

afterwards to remove pollution. The children in the marumakkatayam family belong, of course, to their mother's family, clan, and caste. They are Nāyars, not Nambūtiris. The Nāyars of North Malabar are held to be superior all along the line, clan for clan, to those of South Malabar, which is divided from the north by the river Korapuzha, seven miles north of Calicut, so that a woman of North Malabar would not unite herself to a man of her own clan name of South Malabar. A Nāyar woman of North Malabar cannot pass northward beyond the frontier; she cannot pass the hills to the eastward; and she cannot cross the Korapuzha to the south. It is tabu. The women of South Malabar are similarly confined by custom, breach of which involves forfeiture of caste. To this rule there is an exception, and of late years the world has come in touch with the Malayāli, who nowadays goes to the University, studies medicine and law in the Presidency town (Madras), or even in far off England. Women of the relatively inferior Akattu Charna clan are not under quite the same restrictions as regards residence as are those of most of the other clans; so, in these days of free communications, when Malayālis travel, and frequently reside far from their own country, they often prefer to select wives from this Akattu Charna clan. But the old order changeth everywhere, and nowadays Malayālis who are in the Government service, and obliged to reside far away from Malabar, and a few who have taken up their abode in the Presidency town, have wrenched themselves free of the bonds of custom, and taken with them their wives who are of clans other than the Akattu Charna. The interdiction to travel, and the possible exception to it in the case of Akattu Charna women, has been explained to me in this way. The Nāyar woman observes pollution for three days during

564 851 783 564 [484] [784] [562] 564 562 178 484 841 783 484 564

13;Thurston & Rangachari E-4, 5 (no date) 1909
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841 menstruation. While in her period, she may not eat or
783 drink with any other member of the taravād, and on the
[613] fourth day she must be purified. Purification is known as māttu (change), and it is effected by the washerwoman, who, in some parts of South Malabar, is of the Mannān or Vannān caste, whose *métier* is to wash for the Nāyars and Nambūtiris, but who is, as a rule, the washerwoman of the Tīyan caste, giving her, after her bath, one of her own cloths to wear (māttu, change of raiment) instead of the soiled cloth, which she takes away to wash. Pollution, which may come through a death in the family, through child-birth, or menstruation, must be removed by māttu. Until it is done, the woman is out of caste. It must be done in the right way at the right moment, under pain of the most unpleasant social consequences.
[689] How that the influential rural local magnate wreaks
[613] vengeance on a taravād by preventing the right person giving māttu to the women is well known in Malabar. He could not, with all the sections of the Penal Code at his disposal, inflict greater injury. Now the Nāyar woman is said to feel compelled to remain in Malabar, or within her own part of it, in order to be within reach of māttu. My informant tells me that, the Vannān caste being peculiar to Malabar, the Nāyar women cannot go where these are not to be found, and that māttu must be done by one of that caste. But I know, from my own observation in the most truly conservative localities, in Kurumbranād for example, where the Nāyar has a relative superiority, that the washerman is as a rule a Tīyan; and I cannot but think that the interdiction
[613] has other roots than those involved in māttu. It does
783 not account for the superstition against crossing water,
562 which has its counterparts elsewhere in the world. The origin of the interdiction to cross the river southwards